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SUBJECT: U.S. SPEAKER DR. BRENDA FLANAGAN INSPIRES KUWAITI WOMEN  
AND YOUTH

Summary

1. Dr. Brenda Flanagan, American Afro-Caribbean author and professor of literature at Davidson College, North Carolina, conducted another well-received U.S. Speaker Program in Kuwait from March 1-4, 2008. Capitalizing on her name recognition following a successful visit to Kuwait in 2006, Post timed her current program to mark International Women's Day celebrations. The theme of her tour was "Women Activism through Non-Political Means." Flanagan targeted her message to conservative female students and youth from different backgrounds and genders through youth-oriented organizations. Her engaging personality and genuine interest in women and youth earned her positive reviews and made her genuine friendships among Kuwaitis. She inspired youth by talking about art as a forum for advancing civil rights, women's issues and equality and inclusion in general. She appeared on a popular morning talk show on Al-Watan TV. End summary.

Focus on Youth Organizations

2. The Embassy partnered with LoYac, Lothan Youth Achievement Center to have Flanagan conduct a joint workshop for women and youth on leadership skills. LoYac is a popular youth-oriented organization that manages programs such as international professional internships, creative workshops, and performing arts and theatre training. At her LoYac program, Flanagan talked about her experiences as a female writer and activist. She answered questions about American elections and how she became a writer herself. Flanagan met with faculty and students and the Chairperson of the English Language Department from Kuwait University, to expose Kuwaitis to American literature classics and poetry including her own writings. She encouraged Kuwait University students to look for quality education beyond Kuwait University's walls and consider the U.S., as a destination of choice for quality graduate and undergraduate education.

American Values and Education

3. Flanagan addressed students at conservative Kuwait University where she spoke of her personal and professional experiences as a young female immigrant to the U.S. from Trinidad and how she struggled to complete her education. She provided insights into American society and values by engaging and exposing young audiences to American history, the civil rights movement, and women's political empowerment. She quoted from literary themes and stories which highlighted cultural and ethnic diversity. She skillfully promoted study in the U.S., which is a major Embassy MSP goal. Her own struggle to educate herself "paid off," she said, because "the American people respect those who worked hard

to achieve the 'American dream' regardless of where they came from."

#### Promoting democracy and equality

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¶3. Many students at Kuwait University questioned Flanagan about racial and religious equality and freedom in the U.S., especially after the 9/11 events. Flanagan pointed out the diversity of the U.S. presidential contenders such as the African-American Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, the first viable female contender. "This is democracy in action, where women and African minorities are being represented for the first time at the highest level," she said. Several students were skeptical and noted how they had personally felt discriminated against as tourists in the U.S. because of their darker skin and accents. Flanagan encouraged them to experience the U.S. first-hand as students and not just through short visits, television, cinema and music. Offering to mentor them and help them through their literary studies and cultural adjustment in the U.S., Flanagan exchanged email addresses with several Kuwaiti students in an effort to maintain a friendship.

#### Cultural Ambassador touches the hearts and minds of Kuwaiti students

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¶4. Flanagan continued to make personal connections with Kuwaiti youth when she participated in the University's National and Liberation Day celebrations by joining students to learn and perform the traditional Bedouin "Urda" dance, which uses swords and tambourines. Students flocked around Flanagan, cheering her

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on and taking pictures. After the dance, a group of six female students, clad from head-to-toe in their black abayas and with their faces covered, began teaching Flanagan traditional Kuwaiti female dances performed at weddings. This was done spontaneously outdoors in a garden area of the university campus. Public dancing is generally prohibited in Kuwait, and at one point some passing male students reprimanded the girls, but they continued dancing with Flanagan anyway. Afterward, Flanagan commended them for their courage and spirit as the girls escorted her to her car and waved as she departed the campus.

#### Positive Media and TV Coverage

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¶5. Dr. Flanagan's program in Kuwait achieved positive media coverage. She had a special television interview on the popular youth "Al-Watan Television" entitled "Sabah Al-Watan," where she performed some of her short stories and spoke of her impressions of the Middle East. Her university appearance was also reported in the Arabic-language dailies Al-Anbaa and Al-Qabas.

#### Cost Sharing

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¶6. IIP used Post's I-Bucks allocation to fund Dr. Flanagan's visit and co-shared travel expenses with Riyadh, her second programming post.

Misenheimer